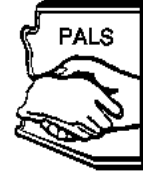




Parent Information Network



How Do I Cope with My Child's Transitions?

As a parent of a child with a disability, you will go through a wide variety of transitions and emotions. These will range from extreme to mild. How you deal with each determines the overall success of the transition. Your goal should not be to avoid dealing with transition, but to know how to deal with the process of transition as you raise your child with special health care and/or educational needs.

When your child is first diagnosed as having a disability, you probably went through the grieving process to some extent. Parents react differently to the initial shock that their child has a disability or health care condition. Some immediately reach out to other family members, friends, or to their community. Other parents feel uncomfortable talking about the issue with anyone outside their immediate family.

The first person that you should be talking to is your spouse. The two of you need to understand what the other is going through. This lets you help yourself, while helping your spouse. If you don't talk, then decisions might be made about school or home; or regarding medical issues, daycare, or care in general on which both of you do not agree with.

Also by keeping the lines of communication open, you can help monitor each other by watching for signs of denial, anger, frustration, guilt, or depression.

Many parents and even other family members can go through times of depression. Depression can be mild to severe. **According to the National Mental Health Association, "If you have been experiencing five (5) or more of these symptoms for more than two (2) weeks; if suicide is a serious concern; or if the symptoms are severe enough to interfere**

with a daily routine -- see your doctor or qualified mental health professional."

- ☐ Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- ☐ Sleeping too much or too little; middle-of-night or early-morning waking
- ☐ Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- ☐ Loss of pleasure and interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- ☐ Irritability, restlessness
- ☐ Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- ☐ Fatigue or loss of energy
- ☐ Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- ☐ Thoughts of death or suicide

Acceptance of your child's disability or special health condition may start to happen quickly, or it may take months. For some, it may take years before you can truly accept what has happened. Each parent is different and has unique experiences that make up who they are. These experiences actually help you develop how to deal with stress, grieving and transition; and the understanding that you will go through all three of these processes probably more than once through the years.

With new determination, you will also have the realization that your family still has a future. It may be a different future than you originally had dreamed about; but you'll start pursuing different goals for your child, and be able to rejoice with them as they are achieved.

Acceptance of any transition happens when you see the following begin to happen.

- ☐ You start looking forward! You are no longer thinking about "why or how

something happened”; you are thinking “how do we move forward” and “where do we go from here”.

- ❑ Your child is coping better than you! Your child “may be” accepting his/her limitations easier than you are. This needs to be monitored. Children sometimes cover up their emotions to make the parents feel better. This is especially true if a parent is having a difficult time accepting the disability and/or the transition. A “cover up” isn’t healthy for either of you.
- ❑ Information is powerful! You’ll start researching for information on your child’s disability or health condition, or where to find assistance. The more you learn, the better you’ll feel and more confident you’ll be in caring for your child’s special needs.
- ❑ You’re not alone! There are many other families going through the same daily frustrations as you.

There are things you can do to help your child.

- ❑ Learn as much as you can about his or her disability.
- ❑ Teach your child about their disability. After all, children need to know how to manage their own needs.
- ❑ Learn about the special education process, including the federal law and your rights.
- ❑ Learn what an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is and how to use it to your child’s advantage.
- ❑ Work as a team with your child’s teachers and service providers.
- ❑ Take advantage of local parent support groups and school councils for special education.
- ❑ Contact regional, state or national disability specific organizations for information and support.

There are things you can do to help yourself with the many transitions you will face as a parent of a child with disabilities.
(Adapted from Ariel and Naseef, 2003).

- ❑ Communicate: Talk and listen to your spouse and your children. Make a collective effort to support each other.
- ❑ Get out of the house. Do something fun - something different. Ask a family member to baby-sit or arrange for respite care.
- ❑ Get involved within the community, especially within the special education and disability areas. You can obtain wonderful support from other parents who have gone through similar transitions with their own children with disabilities.
- ❑ Exercise. Do anything you enjoy!
- ❑ Journaling. Write down your feelings in a notebook. Its up to you if you choose to share those feelings with other family members or friends.
- ❑ Delegate. You don’t have to do everything yourself. Break up problems into manageable pieces and let others help you.
- ❑ Seek. Find out who can help you in your area with specific issues. Who do you turn to for questions or help with special education, health issues, medical questions, respite and/or daycare, or disability specific information?
- ❑ Remember. You and your spouse are a team and you need to share your feelings with him or her – good or bad. Then you can work together to find the appropriate answers.

Transition means to change, and the lives of families of children with disabilities are always in some type of transition. Together with your spouse, work through each transition as it happens. If you are a single parent, find a trusted friend or family member who can help you, especially during the difficult times.

Remember the individual transitions or situations don’t last forever. You and your family can make it through together - as a team.

**For further information contact the
Arizona Department of Education's Parent
Information Network.**

602-364-4015 in Maricopa County
Outside Maricopa County
800-352-4558, www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals/

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